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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 LAGOS 001352

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SUBJECT: UTOMI: WHO IS THE CLEVEREST POLITICAL PLAYER?

Classified By: Consul General Brian L. Browne for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

11. (C) Summary. During an October 19 conversation with the Consul General, Presidential aspirant and Lagos Business School Director Pat Utomi asserted that President Obasanjo masterminded the impeachment crisis in Ekiti State as part of his strategy to sow political confusion in order to postpone the election and extend his term in office. Utomi also contended that Minister for Federal Capital Territory Nasir El-Rufai has been taken prisoner by his own presidential ambitions and that EFCC Chairman Ribadu is abetting El-Rufai by attempting to discredit the Vice President and several of the more visible governors who stand in the way of El Rufai's goal. If the elections do not produce a south-south sensitive candidate, Utomi hypothesized the Niger Delta will quickly deteriorate. While recognizing that he does not have much of a political structure now, Utomi believed he had done sufficient spadework to get the majority of Christian organizations on his side. He beamed optimistically about his chance of getting the endorsement of Lagos State Governor Bola Tinubu and Tinubu's new party, the Action Congress. End Summary.

Ekiti Crisis: A Smokescreen for Term-Extension?

12. (C) On October 19, presidential aspirant Pat Utomi confided to the Consul General that he feared President Obasanjo masterminded the Ekiti impeachment crisis. Declaring a state of emergency in Ekiti was another link in a dubious concatenation that Obasanjo hopes will cause such confusion that holding elections on schedule would become untenable. As part of this benighted project, President Obasanjo also has intentionally pauperized INEC so that it would not have sufficient logistical assets to conduct elections, believes Utomi. Last, Utomi hypothesized that the quest for a third term constitutional amendment was dormant, not dead. Utomi expected it would soon be revived.

13. (C) Utomi believed that Obasanjo's combative personality and his thrawn penchant for converting friends into enemies and enemies into political untouchables has pasted the President into a corner. Obasanjo feared the retribution

that might be exacted should an unfriendly capture the 2007 elections, Utomi contended. Utomi believed Obasanjo's friends should find the President a graceful way to exit. For example, an unprecedented United Nations/African Union special envoy position might be attractive enough to peacefully draw Obasanjo away from Aso Villa. However, such an opportunity would need to be delicately suggested to Obasanjo as a prestigious position worthy of his person.

Is the Ball Out of Ribadu and El-Rufai's Court?

¶4. (C) According to Utomi, Mallam Nasir el-Rufai, Minister for Federal Capital Territory, has been secretly nursing presidential ambition for a long time. Claiming that El-Rufai may be as manipulative as he is intelligent, Utomi said El-Rufai had a conscious plan to set Obasajo and Atiku at each other. With a foot in both camps, El-Rufai played on the insecurities of both men in a way that would make Shakespeare's Iago jealous. In the end, El-Rufai played a leading role in the Obasanjo-Atiku estrangement. This was all part of El-Rufai's plan to eliminate wholesale potential rivals for the 2007 PDP nomination, Utomi offered.

¶5. (C) The other main cog in El-Rufai's design is Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) Chairman Mal Nuhu Ribadu's apparent crusade against state governors. El-Rufai knows he does not have the financial war chest or political structures and visibility of some of these governors, several of whom also eye the Presidency. Thus his close friend Ribadu is attempting to corral as many governors as possible. In exchange, Ribadu has been promised the slot of National Security Advisor or Inspector General of Police should

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El-Rufai ascend to the top of the pole. However, El-Rufai's plans are beginning to backfire, Utomi indicated.

¶6. (C) First, Ribadu's moves have generated too much friction. This is causing Ribadu and El-Rufai a loss of goodwill in many important political quarters. Perhaps more importantly, President Obasanjo has an inkling of El-Rufai's desires and is not altogether pleased by machinations that do not dovetail with those of his own. According to Utomi, El-Rufai and some of "the reformers" in the President's cabinet, including the Education Minister and Ribadu, held a meeting in London to map out their 2007 strategy, with El-Rufai succeeding Obasanjo. President Obasanjo learned of this unauthorized meeting after the fact and from sources other than the participants, continued Utomi. This apparently has created some distance between Obasanjo and his reformers, Utomi maintained.

Disillusionment Towards 2007 Elections

¶7. (C) The constitution is honored in the breach, the census is a political albatross, and INEC is being consumed by the enormity of the task it faces, Utomi lamented. He doubted INEC's competency and denigrated the idea of computerizing the electoral process at this late stage. The 2003 elections were flawed, Utomi said, and he predicted little better in ¶2007.

Presidential Aspirants Foiling Each Others' Chances

¶8. (C) Pat Utomi did not postulate who will win the 2007 presidency, suggesting he considers himself a strong candidate. Aides of General Ibrahim Babangida asked Utomi to become Babangida's running mate, Utomi recalled. He thought Babangida's camp wanted his Igbo and south-south background to balance the ticket. However, given Babangida's mephitic

antecedents, Utomi said his reaction was but to grimace at the suggested association. Not yet affiliated with a party, Utomi is considering running under the Action Congress with a northern running mate. He stated he has had several conversations with AC leader and chief financier, Lagos Governor Tinubu, in this regard. Utomi thought he would augment his candidacy through the eventual backing of Christian associations throughout the country. Further, Utomi thought he could get the Vice President,s backing once Atiku recognizes that he is out of the Presidential race.

¶9. (C) As for other presidential aspirants, Utomi commented that Buhari is easily the most popular candidate in the north but was being out maneuvered in his own party and had only de minimus support in the south. Rivers State Governor Peter Odili will be the first to go to jail if EFCC Chairman Ribadu has any say, Utomi laughed.

Niger Delta Nightmare

¶10. (C) Utomi described the Niger Delta as "still at war," suggesting youth will be armed for political gain as they were in 2003. Utomi noted that during a recent visit to jailed Ijaw leader Mujahid Dokubo-Asari, Asari was surrounded by members of the Ijaw Youth Council. When Utomi joked that he has no campaign funds for the upcoming elections, the youth said they could simply take hostages for money. If the south-south does not see the next president as sympathetic to their plight, things will further deteriorate and fast, Utomi warned. Utomi speculated that Asari,s release would help stem violence in the Delta.

Comment

¶11. (C) Utomi's assessment of the political landscape echoes

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what others have said. What Utomi saw is a President who is hesitant to leave, an electoral body that is lazy and uninspired, political aspirants doing their best to destroy their opponents and a Niger Delta that is turbid and gradually approaching its boiling point. Through this much and more, Utomi thinks he can navigate a course that will lead him to the Presidency. He has a positive image, name recognition, and many Nigerians pine for change. Yet without a party and a large pocketbook, his quest remains a steep climb. End Comment.
BROWNE